

News from Ed Markey

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Massachusetts Seventh District
CONTACT: Tara McGuinness or
Kate Reinhalter (202) 225-2836

MEDICARE MISTAKE IN MASSACHUSETTS: ANOTHER ERROR IN A LONG LINE OF ERRORS

*Rep. Markey, Mass Delegation Sends Letter to CMS Asking About Recent Massachusetts
Medicare Mistake, Other Problems with Implementation*

Washington, DC—Representative Edward J. Markey and House Members of the Massachusetts Delegation sent a letter to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services asking questions about inaccurate information distributed by CMS regarding the Medicare Part D prescription drug program. The letter specifically asks about the 9,000 letters the CMS sent to Massachusetts residents erroneously informing them that they would receive subsidized Medicare Part D coverage even though they are not eligible for the subsidy.

“This mistake in Massachusetts is yet another example of problems with the implementation of the Medicare prescription drug program. This error, combined with the mistake in the *Medicare & You* handbook, the inaccurate letters sent to 30,000 people in Illinois, the problems with 1-800-MEDICARE, and the recent reports of inflated drug prices on the CMS websites makes me very concerned about the implementation of this program,” said. Rep. Markey.

Rep. Markey continued, “Seniors need accurate and timely information in order to make good decisions about the Medicare Part D prescription drug program. Even with perfect information from CMS, seniors and people with disabilities will have a difficult time trying to navigate the complicated Medicare Prescription Drug program. Errors on the part of CMS or other organizations and companies assisting with the implementation of the program further complicate the situation and increase beneficiaries’ confusion and frustration.”

The House letter states, “We are concerned that this error may be symptomatic of larger problems associated with the implementation of this very complex program and respectfully request more information about this error, efforts to correct this error and other problems associated with the implementation of [the Medicare Part D program].”

The letter asks the following questions of CMS:

1. Please explain the nature of this incident. How did it happen? Why did these 9,000 seniors receive this letter? Which beneficiaries were supposed to receive the letter?

2. Have all of the Massachusetts seniors who were supposed to receive this letter received it? If not, why not?
3. Have the 9,000 Massachusetts beneficiaries who received incorrect information been informed of the error? If so, how and when was this information communicated? If not, why not?
4. How is CMS planning to address this error? What is CMS planning to do to ensure that these seniors understand that they are generally not eligible for the subsidy but they will receive additional help for one year due to an error by CMS?
5. Does CMS have any reason to believe that there are any other groups of seniors that also received this letter in error?
6. In addition to this error in Massachusetts, CMS also sent incorrect information in the Medicare & You handbook and sent incorrect information to 30,000 people in Illinois. Have the beneficiaries who received incorrect information in the Medicare & You handbook been informed of the error in the handbook? If not, why not? If so, how and when was this information communicated?
7. Have the 30,000 beneficiaries in Illinois who received incorrect information been informed of the error? If not, why not? If so, how and when was this information communicated?
8. Other than the three aforementioned errors, are there any other instances where CMS has provided inaccurate information related to Medicare Part D?
9. Has CMS found any errors on the website? Has CMS received any reports of errors on the website? If so, please explain.
10. Last year, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the toll-free Medicare helpline run by CMS (1-800-Medicare) provided consumers with inaccurate information 29% of the time and failed to provide answers an additional 10% of the time. We understand that you have since taken steps to avoid or reduce the problems that GAO identified in the report. According to CMS records, what percentage of callers now receive inaccurate information at 1-800-MEDICARE? What percentage of callers are not able to get answers through 1-800-MEDICARE? What was the average time that a caller had to wait to reach a Customer Service Representative (CSR) at 1-800-MEDICARE during the month of November?
11. Does CMS have a system in place to confirm that a letter or mailing is being sent to the appropriate group of people? If so, please describe the system and explain how the Massachusetts Medicare Part D subsidy letter that was sent in error fell through the cracks? If not, why not?
12. Are there any safeguards in place to ensure that seniors get accurate and up-to-date information from CMS? From other agencies, organizations and/or companies working with CMS on the implementation of Medicare Part D? Does CMS have any staff dedicated to quality assurance?
13. What system does CMS have in place to investigate and resolve complaints and/or concerns about CMS or other agencies, organizations, or companies involved in the implementation of Medicare Part D?

For more information on Rep. Markey's work on Medicare Part D and a copy of the letters sent to CMS, please go to <http://www.house.gov/markey/healthgen.htm>

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